# ‘Being Morph’ Operationalising the dynamic nature of doing identity work in reflexive feminist cross-gender research.

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## Abstract

Being reflexive is a common aspect of doing qualitative research and includes the researcher having a self-awareness of what they bring to the role of the researcher and the interactive research process. Reflexivity is a complex concept with a multiplicity of layers and it is the aim of this paper to develop understanding of this by identifying the dynamic process of doing identity work in feminist cross-gender research. In doing feminist research feminist principles and values that emphasise mutuality demand an acknowledgment of one’s own identity and being reflexive about the overlapping nature of gender and other multiple identities and positionality. In feminist research developing a rapport with the research respondents can result in different facets of one’s identity be dynamically used in the research process . In order to help analyse the changing nature of one’s own identity work I am using a plasticine Aardmann cartoon character called Morph, who emerges from a ball of clay to portray different identities to help me clarify different identities one uses when establishing a rapport with the respondents.. Using images of Morph can help one recognise the overlapping layers of identity including self, insider/outsiders perspectives when conducting cross-gender research in this case into two gendered manufacturing workplaces.

## Introduction

In recent qualitative research there has been an increasing acceptance of the need for reflexivity. But how this reflexivity should be implemented is more problematic for researchers as they struggle to comprehend and interpret the ‘slippery nature of reflexivity’ (Finlay 2002, Cassell 2005, Young 2005) in relation to overlapping multiple identities. This is particularly pertinent for researchers doing cross-gender research and those doing critical or feminist research where the ability to maintain an autonomous and self-aware instrumental position as suggested by Alvesson et al (2008) becomes problematic when dealing with differing gender power relationships. In conducting feminist research recognition of the power dynamics between researcher and the researched is a crucial principle of doing ethical research (Ackerley and True 2010, Cuncliffe 2003, Maynard and Purvis 1994, Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, Skeggs 1994, Watts 2006). In this sense reflection can be defined as being about ‘interpretation of interpretation and the launching of critical self exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:6). It is the aim of this paper to assist creatively in developing discussion of reflexivity by linking explicitly not only the epistemic commitments of feminist qualitative research but also the thinking behind the methods that researchers use as well as analysing the dynamic adoption of overlapping multiple identities including gender when being the researcher. How when building a rapport with the researched you will actively draw upon different facets of one’s identity as needed.

### If it is essential to know how you are situated in relation to the project as a researcher when doing feminist or critical qualitative interpretative research. Then how do you locate reflexivity in doing cross-gender research where gender can influence the research relationship (Phoenix 1994) as can other identities such as class and ethnicity? In order to creatively explore this question and extend thinking in this area I am introducing an Aardman cartoon plasticine character called ‘Morph’ to help one reflect on not only the multiple identities we all have as but also to outline the dynamic nature of the identity process we undergo when trying to build a rapport with the research respondents and how differing identities are drawn upon in the interview process.. Underpinning the need to be reflective about this process is the notion that reflexive researchers need to be able to detail the researcher’s role within the study’s research process and its knowledge production (Nadin and Cassell 2006).

Johnson and Duberley (2003) argue that one has to acknowledge the metatheoretical basis on which the research is premised. In this sense feminism and its principles take centre stage in the design and practice of the research process for our analysis and this is done through utilising reflexivity (Styhre and Tienari 2012). Cuncliffe (2003 first page) takes the view that reflexivity is an on-going endogenous accomplishment. Thus research inquirers need to consider how knowledge and realities are constituted before implementing their research design. Thus the construction of the research design owes a debt to one’s philosophical commitment and research practice.

### Opening up the narrative construction and interpretation of one’s ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin your research is fundamental to feminist research. This would also be true of doing ethnographic or action research (Finlay 2006). It is in this articulation that one begins to ‘operationalize reflexivity’ (Mauther and Doucet 2003:414) Ultimately, this should include reflecting on the situated context of your research and possible positionality of your subjects defined here as how ‘others position the individuality, identity and affiliation the researcher may have’ (Sanghera and Thaper-Bjorket 2008:553). Reflecting on positionality and your multiple identities as insiders/outsiders is needed to help achieve a honest reflexive account of cross-gender research (Cuncliffe 2003, Takeda 2012). Finlay (2002) points out that balance in reflexivity is important. This means finding a median point between those researchers who are uncomfortable with disclosing weaknesses in the research process and those for whom it is a self-indulgent exercise. Using images of Morph has helped to give the researcher insight into the overlap of different identities. Recognising the dynamic nature of operationalising overlapping identities in research work can be used to create an honest account about the limitations and benefits of being reflexive in research has been developed and used for analysis of two empirical case-studies Carpetco and Keylockco.

**The Research Background**

The model has been used to analyse the feminist research process of cross-gender research into two UK manufacturing companies in the West Midlands with long-standing ties to the close occupational carpet and lock and metalworkers communities. The two companies’ gendered and unionised workforce Keylockco and Carpetco had both restructured production around teamworking, which had the potential to disrupt generations of shop floor work organised around a sexual division of labour (Author et al 2006). The research methods used for the research were mainly extended semi-structured interviews, sixty-six in total of which just under half were female interviews. In addition a feeling of involvement was gained through informal observation when traveling around the factories and union office, informal and formal discussions, generally soaking in the culture and atmosphere of the particular gender mixed workplaces.

### The model below is used for analysis of reflexivity of the process of exploring gender developments of the restructuring in these two case studies. It will indicate the benefits of being reflective about how overlapping research and researcher’s identity specifically gender, class, trade union and work identities at different points were particularly useful for building a rapport between the interviewer and the sixty-six male and female interviewees when discussing differing gendered outcomes of restructuring in the two companies.

### Using images of Morph have helped the researcher to understand the choices made at the time about which aspect of their identity they wish to disclose in order to build a rapport with the respondents. However, it has to be recognised that this is a fluid process as how researchers are viewed by others is not necessarily in their control (Takeda 2012). For example in the cross-gender research at times I felt like an insider when sitting with some of the older male weavers learning their craft terminology, so a student and at others when several the woman were talking about the sheer physical labour and how they felt exhausted when they went home, I did feel like an outsider. However, while researchers embody a range of different identities (some imposed and some self-selected) in their selves, so do the participants thus it is useful to consider this as a continuum that is polarised between self and outsider with insider aspects being located somewhere in-between. This continuum is fundamental to the model below, as is recognising that as a researcher there is not necessarily a fixed position that you occupy. In the research process your position can shift as you engage with various respondents and other aspects of yours and their identity come to the fore, as will be illustrated in the following detailed analysis of the feminist research process in practice.

## Figure 1. Locating Reflexivity in cross-gender research; A creative process using Morph

Researchers Values and Belief

Ontology: Feminist principles, espistemology notion of priotising women’s voices and stories in doing gender research

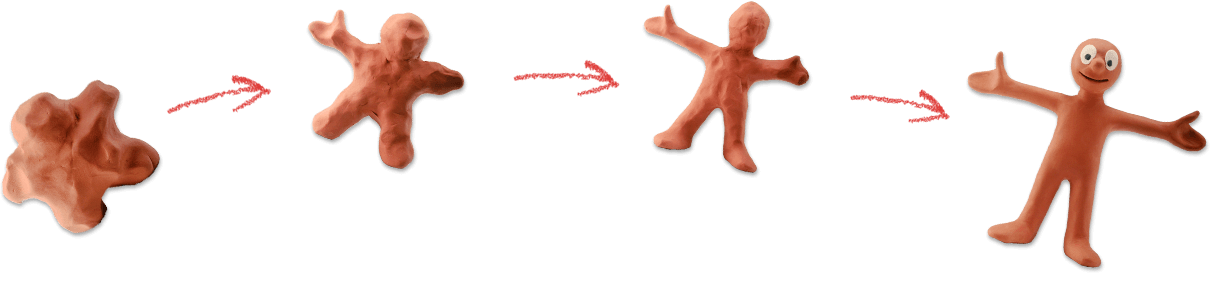
[](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwja6sykx_zgAhWMoBQKHZoeDTAQjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https://www.aardman.com/tag/morph/&psig=AOvVaw2_xFvin2VrTMcvmz-YMuWR&ust=1552478275819988)[](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi9_I_FtvrgAhVYBGMBHZCNCswQjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https://ar-ar.facebook.com/ChasFromMorph/photos/&psig=AOvVaw2NNp_N3Jqmj0LsF9DCGMok&ust=1552405280363996)

Researcher’s overlapping multiple

white working class, union activist, doctoral researcher, lowly financial worker, sister twin, daughter, feminist, gardener

Respondent Identity and Interaction Positionality.

How gender workforce respond to me in respect to their own work and personal community identities

[](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiWjqiJx_zgAhVFrxoKHU_hAh8QjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https://twitter.com/amazingmorph/status/772424018368626688&psig=AOvVaw2_xFvin2VrTMcvmz-YMuWR&ust=1552478275819988) [](https://www.google.co.uk/imgres?imgurl=https://m.media-amazon.com/images/M/MV5BMzYxNzZjZjYtN2QyNy00NjM4LWEzODItNmQwNWZhMzZjZTk2XkEyXkFqcGdeQXVyNTM3MDMyMDQ@._V1_UY300.jpg&imgrefurl=https://pnmovies.gq/video/download-free-the-morph-files-episode-15-hdv-640x640-480i.html&docid=BkZ4xoVBr-ZVJM&tbnid=eTn_WnVHUP2i2M:&vet=1&w=400&h=300&bih=805&biw=1600&ved=2ahUKEwi6_KaivfrgAhVZgM4BHdolCh8QxiAoAnoECAEQEw&iact=c&ictx=1)[](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiKhJG_yPzgAhUQQBoKHQmxDGMQjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/topic/morph/&psig=AOvVaw2_xFvin2VrTMcvmz-YMuWR&ust=1552478275819988)[](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi-tYmYyfzgAhUJyxoKHf5ODDoQjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/morph-back-having-massive-mid-life-crisis/&psig=AOvVaw048VaWLcwGHJIp2H8n9AOc&ust=1552478997968720)[](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjjsvXRxvzgAhUBx4UKHd67AfgQjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https://www.aardman.com/events/&psig=AOvVaw2_xFvin2VrTMcvmz-YMuWR&ust=1552478275819988)

The variety of identities in the model are not exhaustive, other identities that are relevant to specific situated research contexts such as sexuality can also be included. These identities may also come into play as the research progresses. In the following cross-gender analysis identities that were particularly key in Keylockco and Carpetco were gender, class and trade union and work identities. These four identities became central to establishing a rapport with the participant to facilitate collection of the data in the research process. This rapport is in part also linked to the situated nature of work in Carpetco and Keylockco. Both companies had strong links to long-standing working class occupational communities with a heritage of unionisation. However, it is also the case for the participants that you will not have a total picture of the respondents’ sensibility at the beginning of the research but you should be able to have some limited indication before beginning the research of possible positionality as indicated above. As you engage with the dynamic nature of identity and reflexivity in doing cross-gender research it is possible to prioritise identities . In this sense the knowledge of your self as a dynamic insider/outsider in relation to the positionality of the various research subjects will increase.

Useful questions for cross-gender research projects should include what values and beliefs do you have that are essential for incorporating in the design of your ethical framework? What do these values and beliefs mean for your epistemology? These questions are explored in the first section of this paper a question of understanding. Notions of one’s own overlapping persona, whether you consider yourself to be an insider/outsider or both in your research also need to be reflected upon. What do you consider to be important aspects of your identity that will influence the direction of the research and your relationship with the research respondents? Key identities needed to be considered when conducting cross-gender research as indicated our analysis. In the second section the research and the research participants’ relationships including how the multiple identities come into play are discussed.

Next is an examination of the shifting nature of positionality, how the research respondents see your various identities that place you as an insider/outsider from their perspective. For example sharing similar class backgrounds, an interest in football may help you build a rapport with the shop floor workers. However with the long-standing family owners of the company the intellectual nature of being a researcher may come to the fore. This answers a fundamental question for reflection about how you think your research respondents will view your positionality. This section helps us to understand how researchers deal with the subjective elements of doing research and dealing with aspects of their overlapping persona (Takeda 2012, Sanghera and Thaper-Bjorket 2008).

A reflexive researcher has to address problems not only when they design the project but also as they occur in doing fieldwork. Maintaining a research diary is a methodological tool that can help a researcher to reflect honestly on the interview process as outlined by Nabin and Cassell (2006). It also can be used to help expose the difficulties that researchers face when doing fieldwork in cross-gender research where self-disclosure and analysis are required to enable a greater understanding of the social world of the research participants and the researcher themselves. Extracts from a research diary are analysed in this article to illustrate how a research diary can be used reflexively help one understand and sometimes limit problems that one may face in doing qualitative cross-gender research.

The question of understanding forms the first structural element in this paper’s discussion of reflexivity and the practice of doing cross-gender research. This is followed by a consideration of the researcher and the research participants’ dynamic relationships and the role of the researcher. Then positionality and insider/outsider perspectives, the subjectivity of research practices as seen by the participants. The final section provides an evaluation of the model and its potential usefulness being reflexive about research design and practice in doing cross-gender research.

## A Question of Understanding

The ontology and epistemology of this research were fundamentally linked to the choice of a feminist interpretative philosophy to underpin the cross-gender research. Feminist thinking claims that work, and work relations, are inherently about gender and gender relations in management and organisational practice (Cuncliffe 2003: 993). Feminist beliefs and the influence of these beliefs to the research design and process and the role of the researcher are now discussed. The five feminist principles outlined are not exclusive to this type of research but provide a framework for the design of this feminist research. They include:

1, the consideration of the power relations between researcher and participants,

2, the foregrounding of participants or subjects viewpoints,

3, a commitment to the group being researched,

4, an aim to use the research to improve women’s lives,

5, an awareness of the different relations to the production of knowledge between research and subjects (Watts 2006: 385-386).

The ontology question deals with the assumptions one is willing to make about the nature of reality (Skeggs 1994, Jain 2017). The ontology of this research is related to the way that the researcher, see the world. The researcher supports the notion that the world, which people create in the process of social exchange, is a reality (Schwandt 1994: 127). This is a social construction perspective, which focuses on how meaning is constructed. It challenges conventional ideas about meaning and the identity construction of both the researcher and the participants as well as the power relations in the research.

This sociological perspective considers that social reality is constructed differently depending on different people’s experiences of culture and history (Andermahr et al 1997). Thus for me, as a feminist researcher, a social construction perspective suggests that there is a specific reality to working women’s lives, which had been made invisible through women’s lesser standing in the sexual division of knowledge. This is explicitly linked to the second principle of feminist research about foregrounding of research participants in the research. But how is this done in cross-gender research? Skeggs (1994: 78) suggests that a feminist ontology needs to take into account the access to, and discursive positions available to different groups that are likely to produce different knowledges. Thus the research was designed around prioritising women’s voices and women’s concerns to understand how restructuring is impacting specifically on them as women while at the same time including men’s voices to avoid presenting a partial portrait of the men’s and women’s lived social world both in the workplace and beyond. However, one does need to build a rapport with the interviewees if one wants rich data, thus drawing on other identities such as activist or sports supporter can help.

The research drew upon the lived structure of women’s experience (Ferguson 1988). This helped to address the invisibility of women as a specific group of workers in empirical manufacturing workplace studies. A benefit of this ontological position was that by prioritising women’s experiences, but not ignoring the structure in which these are produced, it was possible to reconnect this discussion to other discourses without losing our gender perspective. Thus the decision was taken to incorporate the two dominant voices of manufacturing work, the managerial voice and shop floor men’s voices but only in relation to the women’s voices and their concerns with changing work relationships. What makes particular texts feminist, is not their focus on women, (some may not mention women at all) but a complex combination of their author’s abilities to provide insight into feminist issues, which may ultimately have some potential to improve women’s lives by providing research for women (Reinharz 1992, Oleson 1994:215). Which was why understanding the women’s experience was important for this research as outlined in the feminist principle 2, 3, 4.

**Epistemology**

An advantage of this approach is that a feminist epistemology can accommodate differing layers of knowledge including class that pervade the workplace and the occupational community (Halford and Leonard 2001). A feminist epistemology is concerned with the ways in which the gender, and the gender politics of the knower, enter into knowledge production. Feminist epistemology considers that women are distinct producers of knowledge and are not just objects about which knowledge has been constructed (Andermahr et al 1997, Skeggs 1995). This also includes reflection on the nature of knowledge and our methods of obtaining it. My epistemology privileged women as a knower to help combat the power of traditional privileged epistemologies in manufacturing and organisational research (Ackerley and True 2010)

Thus the research consciously aimed to address the fifth principle of feminist research, which was to be aware of the differing circumstances of producing knowledge, so the methodology was designed around giving voice to women. Feminist social research sees the research subjects as fundamentally gendered beings (Neuman 2003:88) However, an interpretative qualitative approach blurs the boundaries between formal and personal relations. Therefore this research’s feminist epistemology took an empiricist position to explore structural factors of the individual worker’s social relations such as gender and power. It acknowledges how different groupings because of work inequalities help to shape the worker’s contextual response to gendered work practices. Different boundaries (Bradley 1999) inform the gendered workers work experiences, which in this study included discussing familial relationships and work-life boundaries of the workers distinctive occupational communities and unions to help understand the women’s and men’s differing experiences of work restructuring.

Cockburn (1991) claims that research must draw on all strands of feminisms for insight, otherwise the researcher runs the risk of excluding some sectors of women, as women are not necessarily a homogenous grouping. Butler (1999) points out how women as a group can be internally fragmented around class, age, colour and ethnicity, to list a few categories. It is necessary to acknowledge these differences whilst avoiding loss of the ‘who’ of the research in feminist theorising. However, in this study’s structural approach this is easier said than done and the necessary grouping of women around their differing shop floor identity does open up the research to claims of essentialism (Berliner and Falen 2008). However, gender identity was of significance in the workplace context when prior to recent restructuring the men and women had been segregated along gender lines on the shop floor. Thus this research argues that if it lost women as a category this would negate its exploration of the complex stratified realm of gender relations in these two specific gender-stratified workplaces. Consequently an important component of the feminist research was to recognise how institutions such Carpetco and Keylockco as well as their trade unions provide women’s situational framework where gender practice occurs.

Feminist conceptions of gender and work have moved from seeing gender roles as being interchangeable with sex roles, to gender being linked to a gendering process. Feminist research and theorising has moved to a deeper understanding of gender as a process and organising principle of production work (Acker 1990, 2006, 2012). Feminist empirical research such as Lee’s comparative case study of women working in manufacturing in Hong Kong and China suggests that research into work and industrial relations should make room for gender as an equally pervasive social process and principle for domination (Lee 1998:167).

**The researchers and the research participants relationships**

Reflecting on the role of the researcher is crucial to achieve balance in an interactive feminist methodology. But in cross-gender research this process is crucially influenced by identity work (Cassell 2005) and acknowledging that this itself can be dynamic linked to the person you are interviewing. This is linked to feminist ethical practice that moves beyond the researcher dominating the research agenda, and letting the respondent’s’ views influence the direction of the research (Payne and Payne 2004). It also includes focusing on the worker’s feelings, interests and beliefs, letting them espouse their views in their own words. This is linked to how the researcher needed to adopt ways of listening to, and hearing, female language. It has to be compared to the more dominant masculine managerial voices so as to establish differences in the way men and women speak of their experiences as workers and union activists as well as within their own working-class occupational communities.

An important element in the adoption of a feminist approach was that it makes explicit differences between the researched and the researcher. It permits one to recognise the subjectivity of research, and how this can be influenced by the bias of the researcher. This includes the gender and class background of the researcher which influence one’s sensibility. This for the researcher had several dimensions. Her gender and her work experience gave her insight into what it is to be female within a competitive masculine work environment. Her class background gave her knowledge of the constraints and opportunities of working class workers. This increased the empathy and trust between the researcher and the researched. However, a feminist position also requires one to acknowledge that through education she had acquired other knowledges. So a feminist position required her to limit the conflict that can arise between the different knowledge and different understanding of the researcher and the researched (Werner and Schoepfle 1987).

Listening to differences within these voices, roles and identities requires building a personal relationship with the researched. This can only be achieved through researchers stating their own preferences and beliefs and opening themselves up to being receptive to the respondents (Reinharz 1992). This includes self-reflection but it is also about listening for and exploring silence, difference, oppression and the role of epistemology in the respondent’s responses (Ackerley and True 2010: 23).

A feminist methodology is about having close and non-hierarchical interactions between the researcher and the researched as outlined in principle 1. But in this cross-gender research this included voices located at different hierarchical levels in both the company organisations but also their key trade unions. So when interviewing company directors downwards to the shopfloor, how is this achieved? In effect in the sixty-six interviews that were conducted it was difficult to always achieve this. There were two interviews where the researcher felt a rapport was not established.

This section outlines how reflexive thinking about the research process helped the researcher understand why this lack of rapport or silence occurred and consequently how in part this could not only be explained but also in relation to the interviewing sample improved. The two interviewees were located in the same company but at different production sites. One was with a young male management trainee who seemed to quote directly from the company handbook and a female shop floor worker who seemed defensive. Excerpts from the reflective diary detail the researcher’s feelings and responses at the time of these interviews.

*I was disappointed with this interview. I felt I had failed. Never felt that she was totally relaxed with me, or trusted me which was a shame as I felt this could have been a key interview because she had a very interesting work and family background(Reflective Diary 1st November)*

With hindsight the researcher now recognises that it is impossible to establish a rapport with all interviewees and that the guarded nature of her replies was informative in itself of what was happening in the work-site at that time. This influenced why she viewed the researcher’s positionality as threatening. It is possible to speculate that the interviewee was concerned with her affiliation and in particular with her contact with more senior managers in the research despite assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. This concern may be connected to the interviewee’s circumstance as her husband was her immediate superior, a co-ordinator whose job was at risk of disappearing in the company’s restructuring-this was the last section to be restructured. Thus she may have been concerned that anything negative could indirectly affect her husband’s role. Or she may just have been reluctant to say anything that could be posited as criticism of her husband. While this reasoning is speculative, the defensiveness nature of her comments in spite of volunteering to participate do suggest that something else was going on and this shows the value of recognising the blurring of boundaries between work and social relationships.

**The overlapping nature of multiple identities and positionality**

The multiplicity of selves that make up a researcher and their overlapping nature is complex. While some of these aspects such as gender were clearly identified by the research participants other identities are less obviously visible such as the researcher’s age, her working class background and her former work identity and trade union identity. But as Cassell (2005) and Mertkan-Ozunlu (2007) outline what becomes clear from engaging in research practice is how these other self-defined identities also helped to build a rapport with the participants. It also indicates how there can be a crossover between a former professional/work role and how this impacts on the interviews ( Lee et al 2018, Watts 2006).

So how does this work in practice? In Keylockco access was negotiated through the trade union not the company. For the researcher her trade union identity as a representative in a financial institution for ‘Unite’ helped to build a rapport with the unionised shop floor men and women and those in formal trade union roles. In addition having experience of working in a well-known authoritative financial institution’s after leaving school at sixteen also helped to facilitate engagement with working class respondents in both companies, who recognised the need to go straight into work after finishing schooling. In Keylockco women formed half of the workforce but dominated the most senior lay positions with their own small manufacturing union, including the President’s role, and the three senior shop stewards positions. So discussions of the thankless task that a union role can include, and what it is like to work for a male dominated authoritative regime formed a point of solidarity, ‘an ease of exchange’ that as Watts outlines (2006:390) can lead to a more open disclosure.

Another important element was the researcher’s working class background. This knowledge helped build a rapport with the shop workers both male and female, as they talked of the effects of shift work and she chose to disclose my father’s view that working 40 years of shift work as a technician in a factory leads to ill-health did open up discussions about shift-work and combining work and family life. However, while the researcher, uses this sort of disclosure to establish a rapport to gather rich and open data. The negative aspect of this rapport it that this can also make the participant more vulnerable as they reveal more than they intended thereby disempowering participants, which in this cross-gender research meant both men and women. A point that became unexpectedly more apparent when the respondents were asked questions about the companies’ level of social welfare.

Mertkan-Ozunlu (2007) research with elites indicate identity work becomes more significant with this group as they are more highly skilled and experienced in self-presentation thus getting the directors of production and senior managers and union secretaries to speak for two hours at a stretch was not difficult. They were more experienced at releasing information and seemed to actively want to share that information to someone who showed a willingness to listen. Older more senior male shop floor workers too were intrigued by the interviewing process and the researcher’s positionality was influential in creating a dynamic research process. One long-standing shop floor worker who was in his sixties articulated that *‘the interview would be a challenge as he was known for his divergent views from the company*! ‘While other men who fell into this category were happy to speak at length as it gave them a legitimate chance to take a lengthy break from their very physical work. They also seem to find the exercise therapeutic to detail their concerns about the devaluation of their work in the restructuring, to release pent up feelings of disaffection with how their former craftwork had been reclassified as semi-skilled (author et al 2006). Here the researcher seems to become a welcomed listener in a setting where they felt there views were no longer listened to subsequent to the changes in work production.

**Ethical concerns rooted in differing identities and the research process**

At the outset of the qualitative cross-gender research the researcher considered it may be necessary to add an extra stage to the process to let the respondents to review the release of data information about work and family experiences. This was because her own feminist values led her to recognise that different educational and experiential backgrounds of blue-collar workers may make them more vulnerable in the research process. Also as someone who shared a similar background she was concerned about the effects of the research, how its findings in the cross-sectional research could possibly be used to disadvantage less powerful others, thus care had to be taken that research process was not hijacked. A concern that was raised with Carpetco’s gatekeeper subsequent to the trainee manager’s interview detailed earlier.

The importance of including this extra stage was linked to the level of emotional detail the researcher was given when talking the company’s attitude to social welfare and work-life balance. The researcher did not expect responses such as ‘when my son was killed the company was brilliant’ to illustrate Carpetco’s approach to social welfare. In addition it was also important that the workers and particularly manufacturing workers, who are not used to articulating their views in public had the opportunity to check that they were OK with this highly personal and emotive data being disclosed in writing up the research. So while it was relevant it can be uncomfortable for the interviewer to deal with the emotion engendered. At the time the researcher stopped the recording and asked if they were still comfortable with the recording and if they had felt they had said too much it was possible to delete that section before commencing.

However, in hindsight the researcher was grateful for the opportunity for the participants to reflect further on these topics by receiving a written copy because of the sensitivity of the situation. It also perhaps indicates the level of trust they had in her as the interviewer that they felt they could mention these issues and perhaps the interviews could be considered in part to be ‘therapeutic opportunities’ for participants to put their thoughts forward in relation to the company at those times. (Duncombe and Jessop 2002).Thus the original decision to give all participants an opportunity for reflection to avoid causing upset to the respondents because they had disclosed too much personal information was vindicated. Only one person changed the copy they gave because they, a manager, thought it was potentially libellous! (which is another good reason for giving people space to consider what they had said).

Watts (2006:398 ) highlights how when doing feminist research aspects of ethics are complex because when interviewing, active listening and drawing boundaries around appropriate subject matter is required. But doing this can be a mixed blessing at the time as indicated above. So adding a reflective element to the interview process for the researched to review their comments particularly when dealing with issues of sensitivity (Jain 2017)helps reassure, not only the researched, who may well be inexperienced in articulating their views in an interview setting but also for the researcher as gender studies often cross personal as well as work boundaries.

**Conclusion**

The paper draws upon reflexivity literature and feminist literature to understand the importance of reflexivity in cross-gender research. The idea of a round piece of clay, Morph that could be moulded into different identities as and when needed has helped the researcher to locate and acknowledge the dynamic nature of reflexivity in cross-gender research or in other words ‘operationalise reflexivity’ (Mauther and Doucet 2003:414). But recognising the dynamic process is not complete in feminist research unless one interrogates and articulates one’s ontological and epistemological values and beliefs. In this case they were explicitly linked to feminist principles and methodology. However, being open about differing viewpoints on knowledge is not solely confined to feminist research. In ethnographic or action research it is also important to be reflexive and thereby opening up one’s ‘interpretation of interpretation’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:6) to others is an important component in doing any reflexive research (Finlay 2006, Young 2005, Jain 2017).

When designing a cross-gender research project as the model outlines it is necessary to consider how your multiple identity will influence engagement with the research subjects who themselves are subject to differing power dynamics. While this can be considered at the outset as you engage in the research it is not till the data collection is finished that the shifting nature of the researcher’s identity in not only promoting engagement but also in acknowledging how the respondents engaged with her can be fully acknowledged. It is here that reviewing one’s identity in a visual manner adds value to the reflexive process.

In addition the researcher also has to question their own understanding, interrogating one’s own values and belief. The benefit of being open about what these values mean within a feminist methodology helped to reinforce the ethical dimension of the research. It also facilitated self-reflection about the role of the researcher. It also helped to ensure that no harm was done to respondents in the cross-gender research who were very open and honest about work and social issues.

The reflexive diary can be an indispensable tool in dealing with methodological issues offering a honest and open account of the research process (Nadin and Cassell 2006). In this cross-gender research it became a document of value in its own right in documenting events such as one’s feelings about the interview and the level of rapport. s. While it was clear that as a non-manufacturing worker the researcher would always be considered an outsider in the workplace other important identities such as being a service workers, being a trade union representative offer other opportunities for engagement with respondents. However, this engagement was dependent on being honest about these identities. Positionality and how others view your own multiple identities including gender but also class, work and trade unions identities and place you as insider/outsiders in relation to their own situated context (Takeda 2012, Lee et al 2018) is a concept that becomes more apparent as the research process develops. It is in the rapport that is built up with research participants through doing the research and being open about what the research was about and the role of the research that became one of the most rewarding aspects of collecting the data.

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